AN ESSAY UPON POETRY.

[By John Sheffield, 1st Duke of Buckingham and Normanby]

DUBLIN:
Printed by *Joseph Ray*, for *Robert Thornton* at the *Unicorn* in *Skinner-row*. 1683.

167/97

AN
ESSAY
UPON
POETRY

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND
GIFT OF
E.R. McCLINTOCK
DIX.

Dublin 1683(1)

DUBLIN:
Printed by Joseph Ray, for Robert Thornton at the Unicorn in Skinner Row. 1683.

AN ESSAY UPON POETRY.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND
GIFT OF
E.R. McCLINTOCK
DIX.

OF Things in which Mankind does moſt excell,
Nature's chief Maſter-piece is writing well,
And of all ſorts of Writing none there are
That can the leaſt with *Poetry* compare;
No kind of work requires ſo nice a touch,
And if well done, there's nothing ſhines ſo much;
But Heav'n forbid we ſhould be ſo prophane,
To grace the vulgar with that ſacred name;
'Tis not a Flaſh of Fancy which ſometimes
Daſling our Minds, ſets off the ſlighteſt Rimes;
Bright as a blaze, but in a moment done;
True Wit is everlaſting, like the Sun;
Which though ſometimes beneath a Cloud retir'd,
Breaks out again, and is by all admir'd.
Number, and Rime, and that harmonious ſound,
Which never does the Ear with harſhneſs wound,

Are neceſſary, yet but vulgar Arts,
For all in vain theſe ſuperficial parts
Contribute to the ſtructure of the whole
Without a Genius too, for that's the Soul;
A Spirit which inſpires the work throughout,
As that of Nature moves this World about;
A heat that glows in every word that's writ,
That's ſomething of Divine, and more than Wit;
It ſelf unſeen, yet all things by it ſhown,
Deſcribing all men, but deſcrib'd by none;
Where doſt thou dwell? what caverns of the Brain
Can ſuch a vaſt and mighty thing contain?
When I at idle hours in vain thy abſence mourn,
O where doſt thou retire? and why doſt thou return,
Sometimes with powerful charms to hurry me away
From pleaſures of the night, and buſineſs of the day?
Ev'n now too far tranſported I am fain
To check thy courſe, and uſe the needful rein:
As all is dulneſs, when the Fancy's bad,
So without Judgment, Fancy is but mad;
And Judgment has a boundleſs influence;
Not upon words alone, or only ſence,
But on the world, of manners, and of men,
Fancy is but the Feather of the Pen;
Reaſon is that ſubſtantial uſeful part,
Which gains the Head, while t'other wins the Heart

Here I ſhould all the differing kinds reherſe
Of *Poetry* with various ſorts of Verſe;
But who that tak can after *Horace* do;
That mighty Maſter and Example too?

Ecchoes at beſt; all we can ſay is vain,
Dull the deſign, and fruitleſs were the pain;
'Tis true, the Ancients we may rob with eaſe,
But who with that ſad ſhift himſelf can pleaſe,
Without an Actors pride; a Players Art
Is more than his who writes the borrow'd part.
Yet modern Laws are made for later Faults,
And new Abſurdities inſpire new thoughts;
What need has *Satyr* then to live on theft,
When ſo much freſh occaſion ſtill is left?
Folly abounds, nay flouriſhes at Court,
Where on its ſphere it finds a kind ſupport;
But hold, *White-Hall* has nothing now to fear,
'Tis Wit and Sence that is the Subject here.
Defects of witty Men deſerve a Cure,
And thoſe who are ſo will the worſt endure.

Firſt then of *Songs*, that now ſo much abound,
Without his Song no Fop is to be found,
A moſt offenſive Weapon which he draws,
On all he meets, againſt *Apollo*'s Laws:
Though nothing ſeems more eaſie, yet no part
Of Poetry requires a nicer Art;
For as in rows of richeſt Pearl there lyes
Many a blemiſh that eſcapes our Eyes,
The leaſt of which Defects is plainly ſhewn,
In ſome ſmall Ring, and brings the value down;
So Songs ſhould be to juſt perfection wrought
Yet where can we ſee one without a fault;
Exact propriety of words and thought?
Th' expreſſion eaſie, and the Fancy high,
Yet that not ſeem to creep, nor this to fly;

No

No words tranſpos'd, but in ſuch juſt cadance,
As, though hard wrought, may ſee the effect of chance;
Here as in all things elſe, is moſt unfit
Bawdry barefac'd, that poor pretence to Wit;
Such nauſeous Songs as the late Convert made,
Which juſtly call this cenſure on his Shade;
Not that warm thoughts of the tranſporting joy,
Can ſhock the Chaſteſt, or the Niceſt cloy;
But obſcene words, too groſs to move deſire,
Like heaps of Fuel do but choak the Fire.
That Author's Name has undeſerved praiſe,
Who pall'd the appetite he meant to raiſe.

Next, *Elegie*, of ſweet but ſolemn voice,
And of a Subject grave, exacts the choice,
The Praiſe of Beauty, Valour, Wit contains,
And there too oft deſpairing Love complains.
In vain alas, for who by Wit is moved?
That Phœnix ſhe deſerves to be beloved.
But Noiſy Non-ſence, and ſuch Fops as vex
Mankind, take moſt with that fantaſtick Sex.
This to the praiſe of thoſe who better know,
The many raiſe the value of the few.
But here, as I too oft alas have tryed,
Women have drawn my wandring thoughts aſide.
Their greateſt fault, who in this kind have writ,
Is neither want of words, nor dearth of wit;
But though this Muſe harmonious numbers yield,
And every Couplet be with fancy fill'd;
If yet a juſt coherence be not made
Between each thought, and the whole model layed

So

So right, that every ſtep may higher riſe,
As in a Ladder, till it reach the Skies;
Trifles like theſe perhaps of late have paſt,
And may be lik'd awhile, but never laſt;
'Tis Epigram, 'tis Point, 'tis what you will,
But not an *Elegie*, nor writ with skill,
No * *Panegyrick*, nor a *Coopers-Hill*.

* *Wallers*

A higher flight and of a happier force
Are *Odes*, the Muſes moſt unruly Horſe;
That bounds ſo fierce, the Rider has no reſt,
But foams at mouth, and ſpeaks like one poſſeſt.
The Poet here muſt be indeed inſpired,
And not with fancy, but with fury fired.
Cowley might boaſt to have perform'd this part,
Had he with Nature joyn'd the rules of Art.
But ill expreſſion gives too great Allay
To that rich Fancy, which can ne're decay.
Though all appears in heat and fury done,
The Language ſtill muſt ſoft and eaſie run.
Theſe Laws may ſeem a little too ſevere,
But Judgment yields, and Fancy governs there;
Which, though extravagant, this Muſe allows,
And makes the work much eaſier than it ſhews.

Of all the ways that Wiſeſt Men could find
To mend the Age, and mortifie Mankind,
Satyr well writ has moſt ſucceſsful prov'd,
And cures becauſe the remedy is lov'd.
'Tis hard to write on ſuch a Subject more,
Without repeating things ſaid oft before.

Some vulgar Errors only Lets remove
That ſtain this Beauty, which we chiefly love.
Of well-choſe words ſome take not care enough,
And think they may be as the Subject rough.
This great work muſt be more exactly made,
And ſharpeſt thoughts in ſmootheſt words convey'd:
Some think if ſharp enough they cannot fail,
As if their only buſineſs was to rail;
But 'tis mens *Foibles* nicely to unfold,
Which makes a Satyr differ from a Scold.
Rage you muſt hide, and prejudice lay down,
A Satyr's Smile is ſharper than his Frown.
So while you ſeem to ſcorn ſome Rival Youth,
Malice it ſelf may paſs ſometimes for Truth.
The Laureat here may juſtly claim our praiſe,
Crown'd by *Mack-Fleckno* with immortal Bays
Though prais'd & puniſh'd for another's Rimes,
His own deſerve that glorious fate ſometimes;
Were he not forc'd to carry now dead weight,
Rid by ſome Lumpiſh Miniſter of State.

Here reſt my Muſe, ſuſpend thy cares awhile,
A greater Enterprize attends thy toil;
And as ſome Eagle that intends to fly
A long and tedious Journy through the Sky,
Conſiders firſt the perils of her caſe,
Over what Lands and Seas ſhe is to paſs;
Doubts her own ſtrength ſo far, and juſtly fears
That lofty Road of Airy Travellers;
But yet incited by ſome great deſign,
That does her hopes beyond her fears incline,

Prunes every feather, views her ſelf with care,
Then on a ſudden flounces in the Air.
Away ſhe flies ſo ſtrong, ſo high, ſo faſt,
She leſſens to us, and is loſt at laſt.
So greater things my Muſe prepares to ſing,
Things that will Malice, and may Envy bring;
Yet why ſhould Truth offend, when only told
T' inform the Ignorant and warm the Bold?
On then my Muſe, adventrouſly engage
To give Inſtructions that concern the Stage.

The *Unites* of Action, Time, and Place,
Which, if obſerved, give Plays ſo great a grace,
Are, though but little practis'd, too well known
To be taught here, where we pretend alone
From nicer faults to purge the preſent Age,
Leſs obvious Errors of the *Engliſh* Stage,

Firſt then, *Soliloques* had need be few,
Extreamly ſhort, and ſpoke in paſſion too.
Our Lovers talking to themſelves, for want
Of others, make the Pit their Confidant;
Nor is the matter mended much, if thus
They truſt a friend only to tell it us.
The occaſion ſhould as naturally fall,
As when *Bellario* confeſſes all.

Figures of *Speech*, which Poets think ſo fine,
Art's needleſs Varniſh to make Nature ſhine,
Are all but Paint upon a beauteous Face,
And in Deſcriptions only claim a place.

But to make Rage declame, and Grief diſcourſe,
From Lovers in deſpair fine things to force,
Muſt needs ſucceed, for who can chuſe but pity
To ſee poor Hero's miſerably witty?
But O the Dialogues, where jeſt and mock
Is held up like a reſt at Shittle-cock!
Or elſe like Bells eternally they Chime,
Men dye in Simile, and live in Rime.
What things are theſe, who would be Poets thought,
By Nature not inſpir'd nor Learning taught?
Some Wit they have, and therefore may deſerve
A better way than this by which they ſtarve:
But to write Plays? why 'tis a bold pretence,
To Language, Breeding, Fancy and good Senſe;
Nay more, for they muſt look within to find
Thoſe ſecret turns of Nature in the mind.
Without this part in vain would be the whole,
And but a Body all without a Soul:
All this together yet is but a part
Of Dialogue, that great and powerful Art,
Now almoſt loſt, which the old *Grecians* knew,
From whence the *Romans* fainter Copies drew,
Scarce comprehended ſince but by a few.
Plato and *Lucian* are the beſt Remains,
Of all the wonders which this art contains;
Yet to our ſelves we Juſtice muſt allow,
Shakeſpear and *Fletcher* are the wonders now:
Conſider them, and read them o're and o're,
Go ſee them play'd, then read them as before.
For though in many things they groſly fail,
Over our Paſſions ſtill they ſo prevail,

That our own grief by theirs is rockt aſleep,
The dull are forc'd to feel, the wiſe to weep.
Their Beauties Imitate, avoid their faults;
Firſt on a Plot employ thy careful thoughts,
Turn it with time a thouſand ſeveral ways,
This oft alone has given ſucceſs to Plays;
Reject that vulgar error which appears
So fair, of making perfect characters
There's no ſuch thing in Nature, and you'l draw
A faultleſs Monſter which the world ne're ſaw.
Some faults muſt be, that his misfortune drew,
But ſuch as may deſerve compaſſion too.
Beſides the main Deſign compoſed with Art,
Each moving Scene muſt be a Plot a part,
Contrive each little turn, mark every place,
As Painters firſt chalk out the future face,
Yet be not fondly your own ſlave for this,
But change hereafter what appears amiſs.
Think not ſo much where ſhining thoughts to place,
As what a man would ſay in ſuch a caſe.
Neither in Comedy will this ſuffice,
The Actor too muſt be before your eyes,
And though 'tis Drudgery to ſtoop ſo low,
To him you muſt your utmoſt meaning ſhow.
Expoſe no ſingle Fop, but lay the load
More equally, and ſpread the Folly broad;
The other way's too common, oft we ſee
A Fool derided by as bad as he;
Hawks fly at nobler game, but in his way,
A very *Owl* may prove a Bird of prey;
Some *Poets* ſo will one poor Fop devour;
But to Collect like Bees from every Flower,

Ingredients to compoſe that precious juice,
Which ſerves the world for pleaſure and for uſe,
In ſpite of faction this will favour get,
But *Falſtaff* ſeems unimitable yet.

Another fault which often does befall,
Is when the wit of ſome great *Poet* ſhall
So overflow, that is, be none at all,
That all his Fools ſpeak ſence, as if poſſeſt,
And each by Inſpiration breaks his jeſt;
If once the Juſtneſs of each part be loſt,
Well may we laugh, but at the *Poets* coſt:
That ſilly thing men call ſheer Wit avoid,
With which our Age ſo nauſeouſly is cloy'd,
Humour is all, and 'tis the top of Wit,
T' expreſs agreeably a thing that's fit,
But ſince the *Poets* we of late have known,
Shine in no dreſs ſo well as in their own,
The better by example to convince,
Let's caſt a view on this wrong ſide of ſence.
First a Solloquie is calmly made,
Where every reaſon is moſt nicely weigh'd,
At the end of which moſt opportunely comes
Some Hero frighted at the noiſe of Drums
For her dear ſake, whom at firſt ſight he loves,
And all in Metaphor his paſſion proves;
But ſome ſad accident, that's yet unknown,
Parting this pair, to leave the man alone,
He's Jealous preſently, we know not why,
Then, to oblige his Rival needs muſt dy;
But firſt he makes a Speech, wherein he tells
The abſent Nymph how much his flame excells,

And yet bequeaths her generouſly now
To that dear Rival whom he does not know;
Who coming in, ſent ſure by Fates command,
Too late alas withholds his haſty hand,
Which now has given that moſt lamented ſtroke,
At which this very Stranger's heart is broke;
Who more to his new friend than Miſtreſs kind,
Mourns the ſad Fate of being left behind,
Moſt naturally prefers thoſe dying Charms
To Love, and living in his Ladyes Arms.
How ſhameful, and what monſtrous things are theſe?
And then they rail at th'Age they cannot pleaſe,
Conclude us only partial for the dead,
And grudge the Sign of old *Ben. Johnſon*'s head.
When the Intrinſick value of the Stage
Can ſcarce be judg'd but by the following Age;
For Dances, Flutes, *Italian* Songs, and Rime
May keep up ſinking Nonſence for a time,
But that will fail which now ſo much o're rules,
And ſence no longer will ſubmit to Fools.

By painful ſteps we are at laſt got up
Pernaſſus hill, upon whoſe Airy top
The *Epick* Poets ſo divinely ſhow,
And with juſt pride behold the reſt below.
Heroick Poems have a juſt pretence
To be the chief effort of humane ſence,
A work of ſuch ineſtimable worth,
There are but two the world has yet brought forth,
Homer and *Virgil*: with what awful ſound
Each of thoſe names the trembling Air does wound?

Juſt as a Changeling ſeems below the reſt
Of Men, or rather is a two legg'd beaſt;
So thoſe Gigantick ſouls amaz'd we find
As much above the reſt of humane kind.
Natures whole ſtrength united; endleſs Fame,
And univerſal ſhouts attend their name.
Read *Homer* once, and you can read no more,
For all things elſe will ſeem ſo dull and poor,
You'l wiſh't unread; but oft upon him look,
And you will hardly need another Book;
Had *Boſſu* never writ, the World had ſtill
Like *Indians* view'd this wondrous piece of Skill,
As ſomething of Divine the work admired,
Hoped not to be Inſtructed, but Inſpired;
Till he diſcloſing ſacred Myſteries,
Has ſhewn where all the mighty Magick lyes,
Deſcrib'd the Seeds, and in what order ſown.
That have to ſuch a vaſt proportion grown.
Sure from ſome Angel he the ſecret knew,
Who through this Labyrinth has given the clue.
But what alas avails it poor Mankind
To ſee this promiſed Land, yet ſtay behind?
The way is ſhewn, but who has ſtrength to go?
Who can all Sciences exactly know?
Whoſe Fancy flyes beyond weak reaſon's ſight,
And yet has Judgment to direct it right?
Whoſe nice diſtinction, *Virgil*-like, is ſuch,
Never to ſay too little nor too much?
Let ſuch a man begin without delay,
But he muſt do much more than I can ſay,
Muſt above *Cowley*, nay and *Milton* too prevail,
Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spencer* fail.

FINIS.

REGIONAL LIBRARY
GIFT OF
E.R. McCLINTOCK
D.X.

These Books following are printed for, and ſold by *Robert Thornton* at the *Unicorn* in *Skinner-row*.

Abſolom and *Achitophel* the firſt part.

Abſolom and *Achitophel* the ſecond part.

The Medal, a Satyr againſt Sedition, by the Author of *Abſolom* and *Achitophel*.

The Counteſs of Mortons Dayly Exerciſe. A Book of Prayers and Meditations.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND
GIFT OF E.R. McCLINTOCK DIX.

These Books following are printed for, and sold by Robert Thornton at the Unicorn in Skinner-row.

A Absolom and Achitophel the first part.

Absolom and Achitophel the second part.

The Medal, a Satyr against Sedition, by the Author of Absolom and Achitophel.

The Countess of Mortons Dayly Exercise. A Book of Prayers and Meditations.

National Library of Ireland